

LEAGUE TEAMS READY.

THE RACE FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP PENNANT BEGINS TO-DAY.

New York Open in Washington, and the Brooklyns Meet the Champions in Baltimore—How the Various Teams Look Before the Bell Rings—Games and Gossip.

The National League baseball championship race will begin this afternoon when teams cross bats in six cities. The New Yorks open in Washington, the Brooklyns in Baltimore, the Bostonians in Philadelphia, the Pittsburghs in Cincinnati, the Chicagoans in Louisville, and the Clevelandians in St. Louis. After a month or more of preliminary training and practice the various teams begin operations in by no means the best condition. The lateness of the spring has been detrimental to almost every team, barring possibly the Chicago players, who remained in Texas until only a week ago. None of the Eastern teams can be said to be fit, in spite of the fact that all except the Washingtons took Southern trips. If the present warm weather continues however, it will not take very long to unlimber the many lame arms and stiff joints that now prevail, and then it will be time to expect some red hot battles.

The New Yorks begin their schedule in only fair physical trim. They came home from Jacksonville too soon, and, experiencing some winter weather, they soon lost what little activity they acquired in Florida. It is conceded by competent critics that the team has been strengthened in several respects. In Arthur Irwin the New York Club has a most competent and painstaking manager, who, if allowed to have his own way, will get the best possible work out of the material in hand. He has an array of batters who should, with systematic team work, make many a pitcher tired, for Connaughton, Gleason, and Harry Davis have added undoubted strength to the team's stick work.

With Rusle in the fold there would not be nearly so much speculation regarding the pitcher's box. The big fellow is still in Indianapolis, and has not sent a word of direct information as to his future movements. Dad Clarke never was in such splendid condition and Meekins bids fair to regain the wonderful speed which made him famous year before last. Both the other pitchers, Doherty and Flynn, while both are most promising, are practically unknown quantities and will need considerable testing before one can get a true line on them. The team is strong behind the bat and in base running, but it remains to be seen how the present field combination, Gleason at second base and Connaughton at short stop, will pan out, and also the makeup of the outfield. If the New Yorks should happen to win two out of the three games in the nation's capital they would exceed expectations, and could be deserving of a great welcome next Tuesday when they open the season here with the Philadelphians.

The Brooklyns enter the field with a much stronger aggregation than a year ago. Manager John Irwin, the new captain, is a man of Jones, Griffin, and McCarthy. The Irwells will probably be made up of the same men who played it last year. In switching Irwin, Stein, and Doherty, and adding a third, he has given Payne and Harper, both of whom are considered most promising. Still in this latter respect the team is strong, and the addition of Laramie clubs. If the Brooklyns have as much success on the road this year as they usually have at home they will finish high up in the national standings.

The Baltimoreans and Clevelandians who played for the Temple Cup last year have been almost entirely replaced, and the team is in doubt. The Baltimoreans, however, begin operations with old "Hard Luck" staring them in the face. The team is strong, and, although it may not be able to play for a long time, which means that the "champs" will be weakened at third base, McMahons, Hoffer, Hemmings, and others, and a good deal of talent, but experts say that the club will have to win games by heavy batting and base running, running on their twirlers.

The Clevelandians are armed with a few youngsters added, which won the Temple Cup last October. Tebeau has never for a moment been a team captain, but he is well sald that he and Hobson have already erected a flagstaff on the Cleveland grounds from which to fly the Young Cup. The outfit is untried, but it is to another pitcher of the Young Cup culture, but he has not had much success, and probably have to rely nearly altogether on his two stars.

The Bostonians are not making any predictions, but it would be well for the cranks to keep an eye on the team, as it has greatly strengthened the team wherever weak points prevail last year, and as the utmost harmony prevails among the Beaneaters, now they can be sure of a good showing. The Bostonians' pitchers are Nichols, Stutts, Sullivan, Dolan, Mains and Yerrick, and their catchers are Bergen, Gandy, Ryan and Tenney. The Indians are strong, and, with the addition of young Collins, who did such fine work in Louisville last season, while the outfit is untried, we up to it, as it is of Cleveland.

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